

## **Local Highway Operations - Briefing Note for Members: Winter Service Preparedness - 2023/24**

The main weather-related areas of focus over the winter season are gritting operations, dealing with flooding on the highway, and potholes.

### **Winter Service Delivery - Gritting**

Operations for 2023/24 are set out in our [Winter Service Plan](#).

Whenever ice is forecast, we carry out salting of our 'Winter Service Network' to reduce the potential for ice forming on the road surface.

The **Winter Service Network** equates to approximately 42% of the county's roads targeting high speed/high volume roads and includes routes of local importance such as major bus routes, access to blue light operational centres, hospitals and large industrial establishments. The network being gritted this season is the same as last season.

In the event of heavy snowfall (5cm or greater) the treatment of the network will be reduced to what we refer to as our **Winter Resilient Network** which are the key roads needed to keep the county open, linking to the strategic network and providing access to A&E hospitals and blue light services.

We have a fleet of 19 gritters (plus 1 spare) and c.9,000 tonnes of salt in stock. Treatment of the network takes place over 19 defined routes that cover the Winter Service Network. Gritters and salt are procured directly by the County Council under the existing contractual arrangements. The entire network should be treated within 4 hours of the decision and instruction to treat.

The decision of where and when to treat the network is based on detailed weather forecasts. We receive daily detailed weather forecasts during the winter period, as well as live data from our 8 weather stations. The county is divided into three defined weather domains (Coastal, Fernhurst and Inland) and the response may vary across the three to optimise the treatment of the network.

We provide salt stock data to the Department for Transport as and when requested. The objective of this is to monitor existing salt stocks across England, Scotland and Wales to ensure sufficient country wide resilience is in place; and support timely data-collection in the event of any future severe winter weather event.

### **Parish & Town Councils and Residents' Associations**

We have many active Parish & Town Councils and Residents' Associations who have winter maintenance plans and undertake local salting and snow clearance. The County Council works to support their efforts by topping up salt bins/providing hippo bags of salt (up to 800+ depending on existing stock levels) every winter for use by local community groups. We have arrangements in place to pay farmers to remove snow in the event of a serious snow event in line with localised Parish & Town Council winter maintenance plans.

### **Schools**

In terms of inclusion for treatment on our Winter Network, consideration is given to schools that have over 500 pupils on their register. In some instances, operational

reasons may mean that we cannot treat up to and beyond the main gate or entrance. This may be due to narrow roads, parked cars and other restrictions associated with a vehicle as large as a gritting lorry. Some schools may be supported by Parish Council Winter Plans, part of which is utilising strategically placed salt bins and having access to additional one tonne bags of salt stored locally throughout the season if required.

### **Service Resilience**

We have a sufficient number of drivers to deliver the service and have upskilled a small group of existing highway staff to offer further resilience to the winter service delivery.

In terms of Covid-19, the contractor has contingency plans in the event of gritter drivers being unavailable due to sickness/self-isolation. If there was a significant impact, we would treat the routes on a priority basis. This would start with a much smaller network and then treat routes which link critical infrastructure.

### **Winter Preparedness - Drainage**

Drainage provision across the county is provided via gully emptying vehicles on our cyclical programme and gully emptiers to carry out ad hoc jetting and investigation at identified problem areas.

This winter we have upgraded our annually cleansed gullies so that they will be cleansed twice this year in order to reduce the demand on our ad-hoc jetting resource. Dedicated CCTV resource will assist in identifying problems and enable our teams to put together remedial works packages and clear the issue from the network.

We have doubled the number of gully emptiers undertaking ad hoc jetting to four.

A comprehensive ditch clearance programme will start after leaf fall and will ensure that highway ditches are able to drain water effectively therefore reducing standing water on carriageways and footways in rural areas.

We have four 'ironworks gangs' working to replace damaged manholes and gullies identified by either cyclical works or members of the public. At the start of winter, two of these gangs will work on a proactive basis to clear grips (drainage channels cut into the verge to allow surface water to drain from the highway) and gully tops at hotspot locations that are susceptible to leaf fall and detritus build up. This will reduce the number of enquiries and impact on the network.

We have currently have approx. 50 Priority 1 (P1) jobs in the system. P1 jobs are where flooding is impacting the high-speed network or flooding is a threat to property. This figure is extremely dependant on weather conditions and so can vary dramatically throughout the winter period. It is also impacted by the ability of our systems to drain into surrounding watercourses, and this can be an issue when they have reached their capacity, as happened between November 2022 – January 2023 and earlier this month, particularly on the A29 in Bognor.

We currently have around 200 Priority 2 (P2) jobs in the system, which is flooding on the low-speed network, not causing any threat to property. With the additional resource this year, the aim is to reduce this number; this is dependent on the weather and the ability of systems to drain away.

In freezing temperatures, where running water is identified on our Winter Service Network, gritter drivers will 'spot blast' these sites with additional salt and report back to the Winter Service Manager the following morning with any further action required.

### **Winter Preparedness - Potholes**

The prolonged adverse weather issues experienced from November 2022 until March 2023 saw a significant number of potholes occur on the network, and the issues are still being felt to date. As a result of this we have reviewed our contingency plans for winter 2023/24, which will be implemented if we see a similar pattern or trend of issues to winter of 2022/23.

Whilst the contractor should respond to volumes on the network; the key focus of our approach is to horizon scan and forward plan in such a way that we have guaranteed additional resources in place in readiness.

The focus will be wherever possible to focus on high quality (cut repairs) and resorting to uncut repairs will only be considered if resources are 'overwhelmed' due to exceptional volumes.

The following items indicate how we will offer resilience and resource if required:

**Reactive Gang Approach:** Increase the number of reactive gangs (sub-contractor) when certain triggers are met. Contractor will ensure this approach is implemented if and when required.

**Find and Fix (F&F) resource:** We have a dedicated budget for a proactive F&F resource which will commence in December and run until the end of the financial year.

**Jet Patcher:** We will be keeping a Velocity Jet Patcher up to early January 2024 to help with our proactive approach to pothole repairs.

### **Winter Service Communications**

We have already contacted parishes about salt bin top-ups and plan to have all empty or partially empty bins topped up by the end of October and have updated parishes about this year's winter service and community offer. We liaise with parishes re farmers' agreements to ensure they are up to date.

We undertake publicity which focuses on communications to the wider public about winter service provision and also about the need to drive appropriately according to the conditions.

We publish information about treatment of the network on X (previously Twitter  [@WSHighways](#)) and on the Council's website daily during the winter. There's a video available on [YouTube](#).

### **Communications for Drainage and Potholes**

To ensure that we are in the best position to be aware and responsive to localised issues, focusing on where there are known problems about carriageway condition and drainage, we have a communications strategy in place. This will take the form of:

- Weekly comms meetings with staff and contractors to review performance, resource and whether operational decisions are required to be implemented.

- Briefing the Cabinet Member on key operational decisions and updates which will be circulated to all members as part of a regular update.
- Communications Team and Customer Service Hub to undertake planned communications and regular social media updates on the proactive approach to tackling potholes and working to alleviate drainage issues.
- Updating pothole dashboard on website to keep customers up to date.

It is expected that this approach will allow us to provide clear and consistent communication, internally and externally, during the busiest periods of winter.